

whose normal curiosity and aggressiveness in learning was so undermined in later infancy that learning in general and sometimes reading in particular arouses more anxiety and guilt than he can tolerate. In others, failure to read solves a more or less unconscious emotional need, as for example when refusal to read gives the child the attention that he feels he otherwise lacks, or serves as a method of punishing those who, he feels, are overly demanding of him.⁴ The best hope of such children is usually to be found in psychotherapy. Remedial measures are usually ineffective until the emotional conflicts have been resolved.

As to the treatment of reading disabilities, two general comments seem indicated from the material so far presented. First, as in all fields of medicine, effective treatment depends upon correct diagnosis. If after two years of schooling a child is failing to learn to read, a comprehensive diagnostic study should be made, all of the possible etiological factors being kept in mind and evaluated. Second, the solution to many reading disabilities is to be found in the gradual development of the mental health facilities of the schools and the psychotherapeutic resources in the community. In many schools and communities such facilities and resources are inadequate to the problem with which the schools are confronted.

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Top educators and mental health authorities have become well aware of these inadequacies, but the barriers to effective communication and cooperation between the various disciplines involved are only now beginning to yield to the pressures of the need, and the public has not yet displayed its willingness to support the development of special facilities for the emotionally handicapped as it has for the physically and intellectually handicapped.

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The Schools and the Methods Of Teaching

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THE PROBLEM of the teaching of reading has been a subject of considerable discussion during the last few years. A great deal of this discussion has arisen from studies which show that there is a lack of interest and a lack of ability in reading among our children and youth. It has also been stated that this condition did not seem to exist a generation ago, and that the schools are delinquent in providing an adequate education for our future citizens.

The schools are cognizant of this problem and are highly concerned about it.

What persons who are not professionally concerned with education often do not recognize is that the school problem today is not the same as it was a generation ago. Twenty-five years ago the school was an institution which weeded out the inept and only retained those who could achieve in terms of certain set academic standards. When today we have 98 out of every 100 pupils moving from the eighth grade into the ninth in contrast to former years when only one out of every two moved

from the fourth grade into the fifth, we can readily see that the school is now tending to retain the great majority of school age population up until about the age of 16. This means that it has a much wider range of individual differences with which to deal. No longer do the children who formerly failed to learn to read stop school and go to work. They are by law required to remain within the school population.

Another factor that has played an important role in relation to reading is the great increase of stimuli in the child's environment. Radio, movies, television and other visual and auditory ways of obtaining information have appeared and become universal. Thus individuals can obtain information without reading, and as a result for thousands of people reading does not play a role of major importance. The schools are also confronted with the problem of the rapid growth of the school population. This has been particularly true in California where increase in population has resulted in overcrowded classes, double sessions and an inadequate supply of well trained teachers. This has seriously affected the quality of instruction, particularly at the elementary level.

In facing these and other similar problems, the school has attempted to develop a program of read-

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ing that will be beneficial to all the children it is required to serve. In developing this program it has had to be dependent upon the cooperation of the home, the community and the professions including psychology, medicine, social work and nursing. In other words the teacher has become part of a team of individuals who are interested in the reading problem and with whom she is working in order to develop the best possible educational program. No longer is reading considered a purely mechanical learning process where an individual learns a skill and is expected to use this skill in a wide variety of situations. Research has shown that the emotional adjustment and the physical characteristics of the child as well as the attitudes of the parents are particularly important in whether or not the child learns to read adequately. In developing this program the teacher plays a key role. The school administrator also realizes that reading is not a skill that is simply taught in a reading period but is a problem which must be considered by all teachers of all subjects at all levels. He also realizes that, as in the development of any other skill, a certain proportion of his students will have to have specialized and intensive help and that such facilities should be provided through the school and the community.

Here are some of the factors with which the school has concerned itself and in which teachers of our schools have taken leadership:

1. *Development of real understanding of the reading process and of the developmental sequences in learning to read.* Educators have done much research in such problems in an attempt to develop an understanding of what is called "reading readiness." It is well known that not all young children are ready to read at the same chronological age. Developing maturity is a complex operation and before reading is taught a child must be both physically and psychologically prepared to accept the responsibility of this learning problem. This means that not all youngsters necessarily learn to read at the age of 6, which is the common age for entering school. Some will learn to read earlier, some much later. This fact is much misunderstood by parents and others who sometimes do not recognize that reading must sometimes be delayed in order to prevent a child from getting a bad start and thus experiencing frustration during the remaining years of his school life. It is also known that reading development parallels the development of intellectual and social maturity. If in the planning of the school curriculum these factors are carefully considered, many of the reading problems that children have can be successfully prevented.

2. *Study of the methodology in the teaching of reading.* This, of course, has been widely discussed. Some persons advocate that reading should be

taught phonetically; others believe that teaching through words and phrases is better; others favor a motor or kinesthetic method. Several other methods have also been suggested. A good teacher who understands the reading processes and is aware of the individual differences that exist among children and youth knows that no one method will be successful with all children. The teacher who knows her children will be able to adapt successfully, in most cases, the method that is most effective for the particular child. It should be remembered that the method of teaching reading is only a means to an end and not an end in itself, and that the method to be used is one that fits the situation at hand.

3. *The recognition of the importance of providing a positive and constructive psychological atmosphere.* If the teaching of reading is successful, the atmosphere in which reading is taught must be positive. Research has shown that the child who is motivated to learn to read and who is interested in reading learns best. If there is no incentive to learn to read, it is highly probable that not much progress will take place. Therefore, the teacher must make reading interesting and at the same time make the child feel that reading is important to him. It is sometimes difficult to show the importance of reading to a child if the home totally lacks an atmosphere which encourages reading and the parents themselves do little reading.

4. *The encouragement of individual face-to-face guidance.* The good teacher will attempt to help individually a child who has a reading problem. The great majority of our teachers are doing this in spite of the fact that they have large classes and long hours. Here is where the teacher has to seek help from other professional groups. She may need the help of a social worker or psychologist on the emotional problems of the child; she may need the help of a physician to alleviate certain physical or emotional difficulties; or she may need the help of reading specialists who can work intensively with the child to help him with both his immediate and long term problems. The good teacher knows when to seek help. She is often most frustrated when she does not find this help available in her school or community.

The alert school system also realizes that the problem of the teaching of reading is one in which much progress is being made; that as a modern school system it must keep abreast of the times in terms of new developments in the teaching of reading. It is only by continuous research in this field that present programs are going to be improved. We must look to the future and not simply rely on what we consider to be sound practices as defined by the present and the past.

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